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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000200

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [EAID](#) [MR](#)
SUBJECT: SUBJECT: CENSUS BEGINS, MARKING SIGNIFICANT STEP
TOWARDS ELECTIONS

Classified By: CDA Steven Koutsis, Reasons 1.4 (b),(d)

(U) Key Points

-- The Mauritanian census and voter registration drive began February 16 and is scheduled to end March 15, with an additional two to four week period for late registration.

-- As many as 200,000 eligible voters -- nearly 20 percent of the estimated eligible voting population -- currently lack National ID cards required for voter registration.

-- Police officials charged with issuing ID cards reported being "overwhelmed" with the "significant increase in requests for ID cards."

(C) Comments

-- The census is now in full-swing and appears well coordinated. EmbOffs observed census takers as they performed their duties. The workers appeared motivated and knowledgeable about their duties. The National Statistics Office appears ready to collate the information, but it is still too early to test the system.

-- The issue of National ID cards is particularly important for Afro-Mauritanians, who constitute a significant majority of those without the cards.

End Key Points and Comments.

1. (U) During two days of observations in Nouakchott and Rosso areas February 21-22 organized by the local UN Secretariat for Electoral Assistance, EmbOffs followed census

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takers, witnessed voter registrations and met with representatives from the Ministry of the Interior, the National Statistics Office (NSO) and the National Independent Electoral Commission. The "Administrative Census for the Purpose of Elections" (known here by its French acronym "RAVEL") -- the goal of which is to create a voters lists -- began February 16 and is scheduled to end March 15, with an

additional two to four week period for late registration. EmbOffs were accompanied by UN election experts, other embassy representatives and representatives from the Club De Madrid.

12. (C) There are several actors involved in the census process, including the Ministry of the Interior charged with running the census, the NSO charged with creating and verifying the electoral list database, the police charged with issuing the National ID cards needed to register, and the electoral commission charged with supervising the entire process. While some coordination problems have been reported -- such as communication difficulties with regions that lack adequate cellular coverage -- the majority of actors report good collaboration.

NATIONAL ID CARDS CONSTITUTE LARGEST HURDLE

13. (C) Census officials unanimously acknowledged that National ID cards constituted the "largest hurdle" in the census process. According to ONS and Ministry of the Interior figures, as many as 200,000 eligible voters -- nearly 20 percent of the estimated eligible voting population -- currently lack National ID cards required for voter registration. In one village in the Southern boarder city of Rosso, electoral commission workers reported that 127 residents were registered, but an additional 21 eligible voters were not registered because they did not have their ID cards. These residents were instructed to apply for their ID cards in Rosso, where they could then be registered to vote. According to census officials, the ID application process took between three to five days for applicants with the required documents.

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14. (C) EmbOff met many residents in the Rosso area who said they lacked the birth certificates necessary to apply for National ID cards. These individuals did not know how to request birth certificates, and census officials were mixed on how -- or if -- applicants could acquire them. "Without a birth certificate you can't get a National ID card," President of the regional electoral commission in the Trarza Region Ndiadiawar Kane said, adding that "there isn't enough time to get a birth certificate, so these people just won't be able to participate." In contrast, observers in Nouakchott noted that civil registry officials were able to meet the surge in demand for birth certificates, and appear to be relaxing somewhat the strict rules for obtaining the document.

15. (C) The government has said that they have opened -- or are in the process of opening -- 66 new offices for issuing National ID cards. However, during EmbOff's visit, Rosso was the only city with a National ID office in the Trarza Region -- one of the more populated of Mauritania's 13 regions. Police officials charged with issuing ID cards in Rosso reported being "overwhelmed" with the "significant increase in requests for ID cards." EmbOff observed several hundred applicants waiting for ID cards at the Rosso location.

THE REGISTRATION PROCESS

16. (U) The census involves door-to-door canvassing of neighborhoods by a one to four person team of census workers. Once residents have been identified and have shown their National ID card, the census worker records their name, location, ID card number and census registration number in a log book. This same information is given to the resident as a receipt verifying their registration.

17. (U) When the log book of 800 names is filled, the book is

sent to the ONS in Nouakchott to be entered by NSO officials into the voter lists database and the name and National ID number are verified against the existing list of National IDs. If a discrepancy arises at the data entry level, a problem resolution unit has been established to research the name. If the discrepancy cannot be handled administratively, NSO will send the case back to the region for investigation and resolution. Emboff observed ONS employees in training, using previous census books to practice data entry. However, the NSO has not yet received any logs, so its system has not yet been fully activated.

18. (U) NSO will issue voter's cards to all registered voters to be distributed through the regional authorities. However, NSO officials told observers that the cards are only a convenience to help poll workers find names on the voters lists, and are not required to be presented for voting. Voters will be required to show their National ID cards on election day, however.

19. (C) Census workers in Nouakchott said it was difficult to find people at home during working hours and census organizers were considering changing canvassing hours to afternoon and evening. Several census workers in Rosso complained about the long hours and heavy workload. "If I had known it was this much work, I would not have agreed to the job," one census worker said, adding that his salary of approximately 260 USD per month was "insufficient for the amount of work they are asking us to do."
LeBaron